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ABSTRACT

A survey of 1,500 Canadian adults looked at the full range of adults' learning activities, including informal learning related to employment, community volunteer work, household work, and other general interest. Findings indicated those in the labor force, or expecting to be in soon, participated in informal learning related to current or prospective future employment such as the following: informal learning projects to keep up with new general job or career knowledge, informal employment-related computer learning, and learning new job tasks, problem-solving and communication skills, occupational safety and health, and new technologies. Those involved in community volunteer work participated in related informal learning on interpersonal, communication, and organizational or managerial skills, and social issues. Those involved in household work participated in related informal learning on home renovations and gardening, home cooking, and home maintenance. Most people participated in informal learning related to their general interests, such as health and well being, environmental issues, finances, hobby skills, social skills, public issues, computers, and sports and recreation. Participation in all forms of schooling and continuing education increased dramatically over the past two generations; educational attainment of the active labor force increased accordingly. Major barriers to course participation were inconvenient times or places; no time; family responsibilities; and expense. (YLB)

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Mapping the Iceberg

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The following is taken from a talk given by David Livingstone on February 1999 at the NALL Annual Conference.

Mapping the Iceberg

David Livingstone

In the fall of 1998, 1500 Canadian adults were surveyed about their current learning by the National Research Network on New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (NALL). The NALL survey is the first large-scale survey in Canada and the most extensive one anywhere to look at the full range of adults' learning activities. These activities include not only schooling and continuing education courses but also informal learning that occurs outside organized education.

The Iceberg of Informal Learning

Informal learning includes anything we do outside of organized courses to gain significant knowledge, skill or understanding. It occurs either on our own or with other people. As this survey confirms, informal learning is like an iceberg – mostly invisible on the surface and immense.

Nearly everybody (over 90%) is involved in some form of informal learning activities that they can identify as significant. The average number of hours devoted to informal learning activities by all Canadian adults over the past year was around 15 hours per week. This is vastly more time than Canadian adults are spending in organized education courses (an average of about 3 hours per week if we include the entire population).

The survey assesses participation in informal learning related to four areas:

- employment
- community volunteer work
- household work
- other general interest

Employment

Those in the current labour force or expecting to be soon (about 2/3 of the total sample) now average about 6 hours a week in informal learning related to their current or prospective future employment.

The most common learning activities include:

- about 3/4 engaged in informal learning projects to keep up with new general knowledge in job or career
- almost 2/3 involved in informal employment-related computer learning
- about 2/3 learning new job tasks
- about 2/3 learning problem solving and communication skills
- over half learning about occupational health and safety
- almost half learning other new technologies

Community Volunteer Work

Those who have been involved in community work over the past year (over 40%) devote about 4 hours a week on average to community related informal learning. The most common learning activities include:

- about 2/3 interpersonal skills
- almost 60% communication skills
- over half learned about social issues
- over 40% learned about organizational/managerial skills

Household Work

Those involved in household work over the past year (about 80%) have averaged about 5 hours per week in informal learning related to their household work.

The most common learning activities include:

- 60% were involved in learning about home renovations and gardening

- about 60% home cooking
- over half in home maintenance

Other General Interest

Most people engage in some other types of informal learning related to their general interests. Those who do so (around 90%) spend on average about 6 hours a week on these learning activities. The most common ones are:

- 3/4 of respondents were involved in learning about health and well being
- about 60% were involved in learning about environmental issues
- about 60% were involved in learning about finances
- over half were involved in learning around each of the following: hobby skills; social skills; public issues; computers; sports and recreation

Participation in Further Education

Participation in all forms of schooling and continuing education has increased dramatically over the past two generations.

- High school completion has continued to increase: 85% of current youth obtain a high school diploma either through continuous enrolment or after "stopping out."
- Post-secondary enrolments have grown rapidly, particularly since the creation of community colleges in the 1960s. For example, total enrolment in colleges and universities for people 20-24 years old has increased from 7% in 1950 to 35% in 1970, 96% in 1990 and has continued to fluctuate upward.

The educational attainment of the active labour force has increased accordingly.

- The proportion of the Ontario labour force without a high school diploma dropped from nearly half in the late 1970s to about a quarter in the mid 1990s.
- Participation in adult education courses in Canada has grown from 4% in 1960 to 20% in the early 1980s, nearly 30% by 1990.

The Table below shows that there are still class differences in schooling and adult education course participation. However, there are no such class differences in informal learning.

Occupational Class by Schooling, Course Participation, Employment-related Informal Learning, and Total Hours of Informal Learning, Employed Canadian Labour Force, 1998

Occupational Class	University Degree (%)	Course or Workshop (%)	Employ.-related Informal learning (%)	Total informal learning (hours/week)
Corporate exec*	70	71	98	15
Manager	52	73	97	17
Professional	76	66	92	13
Small employer	40	52	91	16
Self-employed	28	52	90	14
Supervisor	20	63	87	14
Service worker	12	54	81	17
Industrial worker	8	33	83	17
Total	26	56	86	16

Source: Livingstone (2001b). N=951
*Data for Ontario from Livingstone, Hart and Davie, (1999).

Although there are still class differences in schooling, younger unionized workers have much higher formal schooling than their older brothers and sisters.

Age Group by Formal Educational Attainment, Unionized Industrial and Service Workers, Canada, 1997

Age Group	Less than high school completion (%)	high school diploma + (%)	post-secondary degree (university) (%)
25-34	12	40	48 (9)
35-44	20	39	41 (5)
45-54	26	36	38 (4)
55-64	55	18	27 (1)
Total	23	37	40 (5)

Source: 1997 Adult Education and Training Survey Data Archive

The current NALL survey finds that participation in adult education and training courses continues to grow. The popular demand for further education courses remains strong:

- ✓ about half have taken some kind of course, workshop or training session in the past year
- ✓ about half of respondents are planning to take some sort of formally organized course in the next few years
- ✓ 60% of survey respondents say they would be more likely to enroll in an educational program if they could get formal acknowledgement for their past learning experiences and therefore have to take fewer courses to finish the program. There is widespread popular support for greater use of prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR).

Barriers and Links between Education, Informal Learning and Employment

There are major barriers to course participation for many of those who do **not** plan to participate:

✓ about 40% say that courses are at inconvenient times or places

✓ over 40% say they have no time to participate

✓ almost 40% cite family responsibilities

✓ about one-third indicate that courses are too expensive

In spite of the great increases in educational participation, about 70% of Canadians say that their most important job-related knowledge comes from other workers or learning on their own, rather than employment-related courses. Only about 4% of respondents say they are underqualified to do their jobs, 2/3 say they are adequately qualified, while 20% say they are overqualified to perform their current jobs.

These indicators, and many others documented in *The Education-Jobs Gap*[1], suggest that most of those in the labour force are actively engaged in employment-related lifelong learning. We are now living in a permanent learning culture, a knowledge society. The most general social problem is not a lack of education and training. There is a lack of decent jobs in which more people could actually apply the knowledge and skills they already have and, as this benchmark survey suggests, are continually increasing.

The basic resolution to the problem of underemployment cannot come through more education and training but through economic reforms. Such reforms include wider employee ownership, greater workplace democracy, more equitable distribution of available paid employment and recognition of new forms of compensable work (as also discussed in *The Education-Jobs Gap*).

Implications for Education and Training Systems

So what should those responsible for education and training programs do in this context?

1. Recognize the extensiveness of the knowledge society and the varied and often complex learning activities and capacities of their target populations. Virtually all

   Canadians are active general learners who know a lot more than they will ever be able to demonstrate in specific education and training courses. They will get more out of these courses if they can put more of their relevant prior learning and

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[1] D.W. Livingstone, *The Education Jobs Gap: Underemployment or Economic Democracy*, Toronto, Garamond Press, 1999.

experience into them. So, engage in demonstration projects to more fully incorporate the relevant informal knowledge of participants in education and training programs. Develop more inclusive admissions procedures to recognize prior informal learning through such means as portfolio assessment.

2. Give high priority to enhancing the language skills of those who perform poorly in the dominant language and are thereby blocked from gaining other technical skills or, in the case of immigrants, from applying already acquired technical skills. Recognize that many with low levels of English literacy have multiple other useful skills they should be enabled to apply.

3. Appreciate that skill shortages in specific areas are exceptions that prove the general rule of underemployment of the existing pool of knowledge and skill. Continue to mount short-term programs to fill the specific skill supply gaps that continue to emerge. But place greater emphasis on developing new collaborative programs involving employers, employees, governments and local community groups to carefully identify:

- actual local pools of knowledge and skills
- local possibilities for greater employee participation in their enterprises
- new forms of work in the community (such as environmental cleanup programs, new socially useful products)
- other means of matching people's underused skills and knowledge with local economic needs

Education and training programs can play a most important economic role in developing and sharing profiles of the current and most likely future types of local jobs and careers to which unemployed and underemployed people can constructively direct their already very impressive learning capacities.

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extent of adult learning, the existence of social barriers to learning and more effective means of linking learning with work.

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